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01 / A PORTABLE FIELD GUIDE

THE CREATIVE BRIEF THAT THINKS BACK

Ideas you can enter. Questions you can explore. Feelings you can bottle.

A guide from **Sahil Tayal Creative Studio** for people commissioning small interactive worlds, research-led explanations, experiences for learning, and experimental sensory concepts. It is written for curious collaborators, not just for designers who already know the vocabulary.

A brief is not an order form for pixels. It is a **negotiation about an unanswered question**: what matters, who is involved, what counts as a useful change, and which promises would be irresponsible.

Our studio is an independent interdisciplinary practice. The projects referenced here are public explorations and illustrative scenarios, **not fictional client testimonials, certified outcomes, or commercial guarantees.**

What you will leave with

- A one-page commissioning question, with options for digital, research and scent-based expressions.
- A method for separating a compelling prototype from a validated claim.
- Worked approaches for three very different media.
- An ethical risk checklist and a practical test plan.
- A vocabulary for scoping, reviewing and handing off creative work.

MAKE A BRIEF, NOT A MYTH.

02

02 / THE ANATOMY

FIVE QUESTIONS BEFORE ANY DESIGN

A useful brief is an invitation to investigate, not a wish list in fancy clothes.

1 / What should change for the visitor?

Avoid “make it more engaging.” Say what a person should be able to notice, understand, question or do afterward. Example: “Distinguish a social observation from a guess about somebody’s motives.”

2 / Who is this actually for?

Choose people with a real context, not an imaginary “general public.” Consider mobile data, screen readers, language, emotional load, physical access and the pressures of their day.

3 / Why this medium?

Interactive: when manipulating something reveals a relationship. **Editorial:** when nuance, evidence and careful explanation matter. **Sensory:** when expression, embodiment and memory are central. A hybrid may be right, but it also means additional complexity.

4 / What must not happen?

List what the project must avoid: collecting sensitive data, pretending a simulation is a diagnosis, exposing private stories, implying medical fragrance benefits, confusing users with motion, or manufacturing apparent results.

5 / What evidence would count as useful progress?

Define observable qualitative and quantitative tests. “Someone completed the interaction and explained what changed” is more concrete than “the experience went viral.”

Write this sentence

We are making [medium] for [people] so they can [meaningful action], while respecting [constraints] and being honest about [uncertainty].

WHAT ARE WE REALLY MAKING?

Prototypes clarify. Publications explain. Products require obligations that cannot be animated away.

Three promises that sound similar, but are not

“This explains a hypothesis.” We can show a model, its assumptions and examples. We cannot claim it is supported by a study unless we have checked that evidence.

“This simulates a situation.” We can define deterministic rules and let visitors explore trade-offs. A simulation is not automatically predictive and should never quietly become a diagnosis.

“This perfume expresses an emotion.” A creative brief may associate notes with a feeling. We cannot prove that a fragrance will produce the same emotion in every person, and a metaphor is not a formula ready for skin.

The smallest honest first version

A first version can be public and valuable while remaining modest. It might offer one beautiful interactive lesson, four rigorous article sections, or a prototype scent narrative with clear exclusions. Reject scope inflation if it hides the main question.

Avoid the vanity trap

Views, time on page and applause can be useful operational clues, but do not by themselves demonstrate learning, trust or meaningful cultural impact. Ask for evidence tied to purpose: comprehension, navigation success, accessibility, usefulness and voluntary follow-up.

A design principle

The interface should make its uncertainties legible at the exact moment a visitor might mistake a story for evidence.

04

04 / WORKED CASE / DIGITAL

THE FRICTION MIRROR

An interactive example about intention and action. This is an educational design proposal, not a measured intervention.

The question

Why can someone sincerely intend to act and still fail to take the step? The visitor is asked to test the effect of constraints rather than judge character.

A six-minute visitor journey

- Orientation: a fictional person has a meaningful intention, such as reaching out to an old friend.
- Inputs: change available time, energy, clarity, support and environmental friction.
- Response: the model displays a revised path and a brief explanation of what changed.
- Counterexample: a high intention still does not guarantee action; low effort may still be blocked by context.
- Rules disclosure: publish the deterministic calculation and its limitations.
- Takeaway: export one friction-reduction experiment, not a personality score.

How to evaluate the prototype

Invite a few test readers with different access needs to explain, in their own words, the effect of each control. Test what happens with no JavaScript, on a small phone, and without mouse input. Check that users do not think the output is a prediction of their life.

Related public work

The Sahilverse homepage includes a small Agency Machine experiment, and the **Six Paths** directory curates a route through the Identity–Action Gap and related explorations. See the reading links on page 10.

THE IDENTITY–ACTION DOSSIER

A careful explainer can make an idea easier to challenge, not merely easier to believe.

The editorial problem

Claims about discipline, identity and human behaviour frequently collapse distinct constructs into one appealing slogan. A researcher needs a way to place assumptions, propositions and possible counterexamples side by side.

Proposed structure

- **Observe:** a vignette of an intention and an action that do not align.
- **Define:** what counts as an intention, an identity claim, an action, a context and a constraint.
- **Compare:** alternative explanations; do not presume one framework always wins.
- **Test:** propose observations that would favour or weaken different explanations.
- **Limits:** distinguish interpretive illustration, conceptual model, empirical data and theory.
- **Continue:** contextual link to the Agency Machine and a bibliography that a reader can inspect.

One example sentence

Instead of “Identity predicts action,” write: “We propose that action becomes more or less likely under particular combinations of context and friction; this project has not established the strength or generality of those relationships.”

Questions for the author

What would change your mind? Which variables can you observe rather than merely infer? Where does the model confuse group patterns with individual prediction? What would an adversarial reader reasonably object to?

06

06 / WORKED CASE / SENSES

THE OLFACTORY LETTER

A scent can carry a story without masquerading as a universal code for emotion.

The invitation

A fictional visitor describes a place they remember: rain on stone, a warm room, or the outside of a bookshop. The creative direction uses words, colours and note families to explore association and atmosphere.

A responsible sensory concept

- **Inspiration:** specific scenes, textures, emotions and meanings supplied voluntarily by the collaborator.
- **Translation:** a moodboard and a language map, not a machine-generated fragrance formula.
- **Exploration:** try three fictional directions: airy/mineral, woody/warm, luminous/floral.
- **Feedback:** note where the collaborator disagrees. There is no correct smell for longing or confidence.
- **Next step:** if making a physical product, shift to a qualified formulation, safety and regulatory workflow.
- **Boundaries:** do not promise attraction, treatment, transformation, guaranteed performance or universal emotional effects.

Where House of Venus may fit

House of Venus is a developing identity for emotional expression through fragrance. It can sit next to the digital and research practice, but a launch should communicate real availability, ingredients, patch-testing guidance where appropriate, shipping terms and evidence for any material claims.

The medium is not the message

The scent does not “mean” one thing. The person brings a life to the encounter.

THE DECISION CANVAS

Every creative direction gives something and takes something away.

When to choose an interactive world

Use it when: visitors need to test alternatives, compare paths or explore a system. **Costs:** engineering, accessibility, compatibility, testing, maintenance and the risk of mistaking a toy model for the world.

When to choose a deep editorial piece

Use it when: qualification, citations and careful disagreement matter most. **Costs:** attention required, editorial review, legible structure, updating source claims over time. Good navigation and diagrams may be more useful than animation.

When to choose a sensory experience

Use it when: mood, memory, expression or material exploration is the point. **Costs:** subjective interpretation, accessibility of sensory descriptions, product compliance if a physical material is made, and the inability of a website to transmit smell.

What we will not pretend

No invented client list, testimonials, peer review, click-through rates, conversion effects, shipping inventory or clinical outcomes. No visitor input transmitted without explicit consent. No invisible collection of creative briefs.

A trade-off exercise

Pick one brief. Rank your three most important constraints: **comprehension, aesthetic surprise, performance, privacy, physical authenticity, ease of maintenance, evidence quality**. Then state what would be sacrificed if every priority had to be maximum.

08

08 / COMMISSION WORKSHEET

SIX CONVERSATIONS WORTH HAVING

The questions below are a framework for a first meeting, whether it lasts twenty minutes or two hours.

Conversation 1 / Purpose

What cannot the visitor do today? What would be better after they encounter this work? Which improvement can be observed rather than merely guessed?

Conversation 2 / Audience

Whose needs might be overlooked by an exciting visual idea? Who should be able to leave or decline? What happens on a narrow phone screen or a poor connection?

Conversation 3 / Honesty

What parts are fictional, interpretive, simulated, experimental or established? Which facts need citations? What claims should never appear in marketing?

Conversation 4 / Materials and handoff

What exists already—writing, data, code, photographs, audio or material samples? Who owns them? What licences or acknowledgements are required? What needs to remain editable?

Conversation 5 / Scope and budget

What is the smallest valuable deliverable? What is explicitly excluded? How will revisions be approved, and what happens if a dependency changes? Budget and deadline can be discussed without inventing a quote before the brief exists.

Conversation 6 / After launch

Who will maintain links and content? Who has access? How are bugs reported? What would trigger a new review? What does a responsible shutdown or archive look like?

THE RELEASE GATE

A good launch proves that the work functions—not that the team knows the language of “quality.”

Evidence to collect before a handoff

- **Function:** links, keyboard controls, forms, exports, downloads and routes genuinely work.
- **Access:** check small mobile screens and keyboard-only use; inspect focus, contrast, target sizes and text readability.
- **Motion:** honour reduced-motion preferences and provide a clear optional pause or simplification control.
- **No-script:** core information and navigation must not vanish when JavaScript is off.
- **Truthfulness:** no invented projects, testimonials, awards, metrics, review counts or verified deployment status.
- **Privacy:** data collection is explicit, necessary and secure; local-only tools really stay local.
- **Evidence:** source links, assumptions and limitations are discoverable.
- **Performance:** slow connections and old devices have a path through the experience.
- **Search:** unique description, canonical, sitemap, structured data only where true.
- **Handoff:** editable sources, third-party licences, deployment instructions and known open issues.

A useful refusal

If the evidence is missing, change the wording. If the interaction cannot be used by keyboard, change the interaction. If the product cannot be safely made or legally sold, do not launch it as ready. The most respectful creative decision may be to narrow the promise.

10

10 / READ FURTHER AND TAKE AWAY

YOUR ONE-PAGE STARTER

Copy these questions into an email, a notebook or the brief designer at studio.sahilverse.online.

The project in plain language

Working title: _____
Question worth exploring: _____
Audience and context: _____
Chosen medium (and why): _____
Known constraints and uncertainties: _____
One valuable deliverable: _____
One thing we will not claim: _____

A short, honest reading shelf

Design Council. “The Double Diamond.” A framework for discovering, defining, developing and delivering: <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/our-resources/the-double-diamond/>

W3C. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2. Official standard, revised 2024: <https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG22/>

W3C. Technique C39: Using prefers-reduced-motion. <https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG22/Techniques/css/C39.html>

Nielsen Norman Group. 10 Usability Heuristics for User Interface Design: <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/ten-usability-heuristics/>

Related Sahilverse work

The living selected atlas: <https://sahilverse.online/atlas/>

Six curated reading routes: <https://sahilverse.online/paths/>

Canonical creator home and public demonstrations: <https://sahiltayal.com/>

Studio and private, local-first collaboration brief: <https://studio.sahilverse.online/>

KEEP THE QUESTION ALIVE.